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ABSTRACT

Parents of gifted minority children need to be involved in their children's education. Cultural differences and values can present obstacles to communication between parents and the schools. Difficulties in assessment and identification of minority gifted students arise over issues related to parents' perceptions of their child's giftedness, their feelings of their responsibility vs. the school's in educating their child, the instruments used in assessment, and the prevalent underestimation of the potential of the linguistically/culturally different child. Parents can help in educational programing by providing information about what different cultures value as gifted or talented behaviors. A cultural framework can be applied to specific classroom activities to teach ideological, sociological, attitudinal, and technological-artistic values of the culture. The school can help the parents via direct and indirect contact. (CL)

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The Role of the Family in the Identification and Education of Gifted Minority Children

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The Role of the Family in the Identification and Education of Gifted Minority Children

When considering the functions of the family and school as they relate to the social and academic development of culturally diverse gifted children, it is important to consider five general concepts: (a) parents of gifted children should be considered parents of children who have special educational, social, and personal needs (Marion, 1980); (b) parents of gifted children, and especially minority parents, often have no training or little information to help them identify their child's giftedness and special needs; (c) formal and informal assessment procedures have been responsible for inappropriate identification and placement of these children (CEC, 1978); (d) in order to be most effective, programs for gifted minority children must integrate the language and culture of the home into the school curriculum (Hilliard, 1980); and, (e) communication and information exchange between school professionals and parents is critical to the identification, assessment, and programming processes. This paper will expand upon each of these broad concepts areas with the intent of focusing on the facilitation of parent involvement with gifted minority children.

The Role of the Family in the Education of Their Children

Minuchin (1974) describes the family as a microcosmic social system which develops roles and rules that are intended to maintain, enhance, and perpetuate the system within the larger context of community and

culture. Lightfoot (1981) has said that "families continue to offer the greatest potential for cultural cohesion and continue to perform the most complex, subtle, and difficult...task...of socialization." (p. 97).

While parents provide a supportive, loving home atmosphere, there is much that they do to assist the schools in understanding their child's ability and potential. Parents know their children better than anyone else. Clark (1979) has stated that no one can equal parents' knowledge of the child, their concern or responsiveness. The parents' observation of the child and the bringing of their observations to the attention of teachers, diagnosticians, and other experts facilitate the early identification of the gifted child and his/her placement in a special program.

Implications of Culture in Family Involvement

In culturally different families, especially Mexican American families, because of the traditional extended family network, the family not only provides socialization and cultural cohesion, but a sense of support, strength, and acceptance for all family members.

Many researchers in the area of giftedness have pointed out that giftedness and talent are differently perceived from culture to culture because each culture has different values. While ability in some characteristics may not be of great importance or value to some cultural groups, it is imperative that school officials be sensitive to the values of different cultural groups and not impose their own values on others.

Definitions and Characteristics of Giftedness

The most widely accepted definition of giftedness was generated by the 1972 United States Commission of Education (Marland, 1972). It stated that gifted students are:

> those identified by professionally qualified personnel, who by virtue of their outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programs in order to realize their contributions to self and society (p. 2).

The commission additionally cited general areas where children could demonstrate potential or achievement. These were: (a) general intellectual ability, (b) specific academic aptitudes, (c) creative or productive thinking, (d) leadership ability, (e) visual and performing arts, and (f) psychomotor ability (Marland, 1972). Clark (1981) has credited research by Getzels and Jackson (1962) as having developed and expanded references to the concepts of divergent activity. Those authors contend that divergent thinking is characteristic of gifted learners and refers to "intellectual actions that are based on the ability to produce new forms--to conjoin elements that are customarily thought of as independent or dissimilar" (Clark, 1981, p. 25).

Silverman (1982) has developed a list of behaviors which characterize gifted children in general. These include tendencies to:

1. Have a unique learning style.
2. Learn faster than most children.
3. Develop earlier (walking, talking, reading).
4. Ask complex questions and display a high degree of curiosity.
5. Give complicated, detailed explanations.

6. Grasp relationships quickly.
7. Organize information in new ways.
8. See many solutions to a problem.
9. Have an unusually good memory.
10. Use abstract thought processes.
11. See ambiguity in factual material (e.g., true-false questions).
12. Have a large vocabulary.
13. Express self well.
14. Have varied interests.
15. Delight in discovery and problem solving.
16. Enjoy working independently.
17. Have a longer attention span than peers.
18. Persevere in areas of interest.
19. Have a highly developed sense of humor.
20. Be a perfectionist.
21. Prefer the company of older children and adults.
22. Be highly energetic.
23. Exhibit strong personal values.
24. Be highly sensitive about self and others.
25. Show a high level of self-esteem (p. 174).

Implicat'ons for Minority Children

Pendarvis (1981) has stated that many studies designed to identify characteristics of gifted children have been based on samples which are

predominantly Anglo, middle- or upper-class children. She has cautioned that until further research is done with gifted children from different socioeconomic levels, there may exist a discrepancy in identification of gifted children from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Bernal (1974) has indicated that the definition of giftedness should develop from those factors which a particular cultural group defines as such. In a cross-cultural study of giftedness, Bernal stated that in the Mexican American community, reported characteristics of giftedness were of a behavioral nature rather than of the traditional view of intelligence. Explicitly, Bernal surmised from data collected in the Mexican American community that a child's interaction with an adult at an adult level, or the exhibition of a distinct style, was seen as an indication of giftedness. As a result of his research, Bernal has suggested that the use of the dominant language is critical in the provision of effective instruction to minority children, thereby legitimatizing methods for identifying and assessing minority group children.

Clark (1981) has suggested that multiple criteria encompassing all aspects of a child's performance must be utilized in the identification of culturally different gifted children. She has noted that Sato (1974) stressed the need for professionals involved in the identification process to understand sociological and environmental factors related to various cultures so that the process might be more appropriate.

Methods for Parent Involvement in the Education of Gifted Minority Children

Legal Directions

Marion (1980) has stated that relationships between parents of culturally diverse exceptional children have been greatly influenced by court decisions and legislative enactments. In support of the point, he has reviewed several cases (including The Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania, 1971 and Mills v. The Board of Education, 1972) where parents and/or minority concerns motivated court action. The decisions of these and similar cases led to the enactment of legislation which positively represents and protects the rights of parents of all exceptional children in the identification, assessment, placement, and programming processes. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 (PL 93-112) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) both require parent notification and approval in all aspects of identification, assessment, placement and programming. Additionally, the laws guarantee that those activities be conducted in the language of the parent and provide for due process should a dispute arise.

Methodology

In order to exercise and enhance legal guarantees to support the involvement of parents of culturally diverse children who are gifted, parents must first be made aware of the processes, their rights, and their child's role in relation to the school environment. Following are

suggestions which may facilitate the involvement of minority parents in the educational development of their gifted children.

Identification. In the identification process, all school districts have well defined criteria for identifying exceptional children and for making referals for assessment purposes. The "signals" which indicate giftedness are generally related to the U.S. Office of Education definition of giftedness (cited previously) and to descriptors outlined by researchers in the field. Hall and Skinner (1980) have developed a list of characteristics which parents may observe and bring to the attention of school personnel. It includes the following behaviors:

1. Has displayed unusual talent in music, drawing, rhythms, or other art forms.
2. Asks many "intelligent questions" about topics in which young children do not ordinarily have an interest.
3. Keen observation and retention of information about things he or she has observed.
4. The ability to concentrate for a longer period of time than other children his or her age.
5. An early interest in clocks and calendars, and an ability to understand their function.
6. The early accurate use of a large vocabulary.
7. Spoke in entire sentences at an unusually early age.
8. The ability to tell or reproduce stories and events with great detail at an early age.
9. Carries on intelligent conversations with older children and adults.
10. Learned to read early with little or no formal teaching.
11. Can write short stories, poems, letters (pp. 7-9).

Based on their observations, parents who suspect giftedness in their children may directly request assessment for purposes of better defining their child's abilities/potential and for possible placement in a special program.

Assessment. While each state has different criteria for identifying gifted children, most have developed a list of characteristics which indicate giftedness or talent, and which become the basis for referral for assessment. Once the child has been referred, it is required by law (PL 93-112 and PL 94-142) that parents give their permission for testing. It has been noted that many problems may evolve in the assessment of minority gifted children and subsequently in the roles of their parents in that process. These problems focus on four basic issues: (a) the perception of the parent of their child's giftedness; (b) their perception of their responsibility in relation to the school's responsibility in the education of the child; (c) the actual instruments which are used in the assessment process; and (d) an underestimation of the potential of the linguistically/culturally different child. Regarding minority parent perceptions of their child's giftedness, Marion (1980) has stated that most studies which have examined reactions of parents to the birth and development of exceptional children have observed Anglo American parents. Marion also indicated that in cultures where familial structures are extensive, and where the roles of religion and feelings of acceptance are significant (as in Mexican American and Black families), parents do not tend to see the child as unique or unusual in terms of his individual needs.

Additionally, Marion (1980) has suggested that parents of culturally different children may feel isolated in relation to the typical school structure, parent organizations and the goals of a middle class oriented institution. The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (1976) has suggested that educators and other professionals should "recognize... what a big job it is to raise an exceptional child and help parents find...the range of programs, services, and financial resources needed to make it possible for parents to do the job with dignity" (p. 2). The implications for parents of gifted minority children are obvious.

In terms of the actual testing instruments, Bailey and Harbin (1980) have reviewed criticism of the use of standardized tests stating that they: (a) include large number of "loaded" items based on Anglo, middle class values and experiences (Williams, 1970); (b) penalize children with linguistically different styles; (c) may not reflect the cognitive styles found in many children from low income families (Cohen, 1969); and (d) are scored based on norms derived from predominantly Anglo, middle class populations. Mercer (1973) has observed similar phenomenon and has labeled intelligence tests as "anglocentric." Suggestions for parents in the area of assessment might include: (a) increasing awareness; (b) insisting on explanations and testing in the dominant language; (c) seeking the use of cultural information in the diagnostic context (Hilliard, 1980); and (d) encouraging the use of multiple criteria for evaluating a child's potential (including parental observations).

A final issue to be considered in the assessment process is that of the possible underestimation of the potential of the linguistically and

culturally different child. Recent research on the effects of bilingualism on general intellectual development seems to have definite implications for the study of bilingual gifted children. Clark (1981) has reported that in their research on bilingualism and cognition, Peal and Lambert (1962) have suggested that bilinguals have a more flexible cognitive structure. Cummins (1977) observed that learning a second language does increase the abilities for divergent thinking. It has been proposed that bilingual children have developed a more flexible "learning set" as the result of transferring from one language and perspective to another. It would appear then, that the current use of standardized tests may prevent the gifted minority child from demonstrating his/her real potential. Again, awareness on the part of parents is essential as is their willingness to exercise their legal rights in monitoring the identification, assessment and placement processes.

Placement. With regard to placement, each state and district has defined services to gifted students according to individual state standards and funding criteria. Placement in programs which provide special services to the gifted generally involves one of three alternatives: (a) enrichment, (b) grouping, or (c) acceleration. These alternatives may be exercised through the regular or special classroom. Placement, however, is contingent upon assessment results, so in order for it to be appropriate, evaluation must first be accurate. In the placement process, parents also have the right and responsibility to approve the final action. They have the additional privilege of pursuing due process if they are dissatisfied.

Programming. In the programming process, parents of minority gifted children can be of invaluable assistance in helping school officials learn about and appreciate what different cultures value as gifted or talented behaviors.

All children come to school with a great wealth of information and experiences that their teachers know little or nothing about. This is especially true of minority gifted children. The minority gifted child must be made to feel that his culture and experiences are worthwhile.

Classroom teachers can and should capitalize on the experiences and information their minority gifted students bring to school. Torrance (1974) has written that by allowing our minority gifted students to teach us and the other children, the curriculum is enriched for all students. The gifted child is, at the same time, given the chance to teach the things he/she is most highly motivated to do and the things he is most skilled at.

To help the teacher organize the activities that her minority gifted children teach the class, Gallegos's (1974) cultural framework might be expanded to include specific classroom activities. Following are examples which may be adapted to various age levels and/or program alternatives:*

Ideological

1. Family Structure - development of a family tree; discussion, drawnup related to family members.
2. Religion - The activities related to the legend of the Virgen de Guadalupe; the making of papier-mache figures associated with Easter Week.

*These are not meant to be activities for gifted children, per se, but are Gallegos' definitions of Ideological, Sociological, etc. The teacher should plan activities under these categories that are challenging learning experiences for the gifted children.

Sociological

1. Customs - make and taste traditional foods such as tortillas, enchiladas, chile.

2. Traditions - role play and explore celebrations of holidays such as Las Posadas at Christmas time.

Attitudinal

Attention must be paid to children's various value systems and reactions which reflect attitudes or perceptions they have developed within the context of a particular culture. Those attitudes must be respected and utilized in an appropriate manner as determined by situations which arise. These may be reflected in individual or group interactions and may be incorporated into the creative endeavors of children (story, play development, etc.).

Technological-Artistic

1. Music - sing songs in Spanish and play accompanying rhythm games. Also, children's dances or listening activities involve children at a variety of levels.

2. Art - craft activities are a natural tool for incorporating culture into the curriculum. They are also quite adaptable to children with a variety of exceptionalities.

3. Literature - reading and listening to stories is an excellent means for incorporating and transmitting cultural concepts. These activities also adapt to the needs of a variety of children.

Many parents feel a deep concern and anxiety when their child is identified as being gifted. This may be doubly true for minority parents, especially, those from lower socioeconomic and educational levels. Parents of minority gifted children need to be assured that their gifted child is progressing in school. They also should be provided with ideas and materials that will help them help their child. To do this, it is essential to establish communication and information exchange between the home and school. The two basic ways of doing this are directly and indirectly.

Direct parent involvement refers to parents coming to the school for conferences, training sessions, and volunteering in the classroom. Because it is currently common for both parents to work, and because more children come from single-parent families, it is important that the schools set up meetings where it is most convenient for the parents, and where the largest turnouts can be expected. While it will be argued by some that all parents will not turn out all the time, most parents are interested in learning more about how they can help their child progress in school. Where counselors, teachers, and other school officials make an effort to include counseling or training sessions in a language or using cultural references understood by minority parents, they will feel more encouraged to participate.

Getting the parents of the culturally different gifted students to volunteer in the classroom can be enriching to all students, as another perspective is brought into the classroom. Many minority parents may have talents or gifts of their own that they would share with their child's classmates if given the chance.

Indirect contact with parents means communicating to parents, in a language they understand, the events going on in the classroom or in the school. It also means gathering information about the community and family from the child.

With gifted children it would be easy and extremely gratifying to the parents to have the children write, illustrate, publish, and take home a newsletter - perhaps a bilingual newsletter - of classroom events. Not only do the parents keep abreast of the children's activities, but

this gives the children a chance to further develop their writing, editing, and reading skills, and to put their creativity to good use.

Handbooks explaining school policy in general, and services provided for gifted children in particular, should also be available to parents in terms that they will understand.

The school can work with community agencies that provide special activities for gifted children, compile a list of these agencies and activities, and make it available to parents, (Lister and Anderson, 1981).

It is important not only that parents know about the schools but that schools learn about the children's background and family. Knowing a gifted child's background and more about his family will facilitate in implementing a curriculum that enhances the child's strengths and helps him develop his weaknesses.

The incorporation of the cultural framework developed by Gallegos (1974) may give a teacher insights into the child and family values, traditions, and to the contribution each minority gifted child's group has made to the mainstream American culture.

In conclusion, the involvement of the family in the education of its children is desirable and beneficial. When children are exceptional, and gifted, in particular, this involvement becomes even more critical. It is imperative, however, that educators and other professionals consider especially the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the family when involving parents in identification, assessment, placement and programming processes.

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